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Commuter-friendly employers praised

Forty companies named 'Best Workplaces' for helping workers to find alternatives to driving

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If you're an employee at the Guidant Corp.'s Arden Hills campus, you can bike to work and then shower, or hop onto a vanpool passing through in your neighborhood. If you're working late on a project or need to make an emergency trip home, the company will pick up your cab fare.

Those are some of the benefits that helped put Guidant on the list of Best Workplaces for Commuters, a designation by a coalition of commuter groups, businesses and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Forty companies in the Twin Cities area and Rochester, employing a combined 83,000 people, are being recognized for offering benefit packages that encourage workers to bike, carpool or take the bus or train instead of driving to work alone.

Some other companies designated are Best Buy, Ceridian Corp., Mayo Clinic in Rochester, American Express Financial Advisors and Starkey Laboratories. To qualify, companies need to provide monthly transit passes or subsidies, and at least three supporting benefits, such as lockers and showers for bikers.

In the Twin Cities region, most people still prefer to drive alone, adding to traffic congestion and air pollution. In Hennepin and Ramsey counties, 850,000 people commute to work and 75 percent of those drive alone, according to the Census Bureau.

Some companies, like Guidant, are trying to reduce that trend.

At least 10 percent of the 3,000 employees at Guidant's cardiac rhythm management division telecommute at least one day a week. Ceridian in Bloomington provides laptops, ergonomic chairs and office supplies to nearly 200 employees working from home full-time. Best Buy in Richfield offers a fully subsidized MetroPass for unlimited train and bus trips. Starkey Laboratories in Eden Prairie offers carpoolers \$25 each month they carpool to work a minimum of three times per week and enters carpool participants in a monthly drawing for prizes.

Since giving its five employees a 50 percent subsidy on bus and train commutes last year, the University of Minnesota Foundation Investment Advisors, another company on the list, reduced the mileage employees drove to and from work by 37,800 miles.

The discount definitely helped encourage employees to commute. But they also had better access to bus and train transit when the group moved from the University campus to downtown Minneapolis, said Alicia Johnson, the executive administrator.

Since its launch four years ago, the nationwide Best Workplaces for Commuters program has grown from 175 employers to more than 1,100 with more than 2 million employees. The EPA's goal is to reduce air pollution by making commuter packages as common a workplace benefit as 401(k) programs, said Robin Snyder, an EPA program manager. She claims the benefit is relatively painless to provide compared with a salary increase, and employers who do offer subsidies and incentives receive tax breaks, she said.

Here are Twin Cities companies cited as Best Workplaces for Commuters: Abbott Northwestern, Minneapolis; American Express Financial Advisors, Minneapolis; Anoka County TMO, Andover; Bemis Company, Inc., Minneapolis; Best Buy Co., Inc., Richfield; CenterPoint Energy, Minneapolis; Ceridian Corp., Bloomington; CRP Holdings, LLC, Minneapolis; CSM Corp., Minneapolis; Disciplined Growth Investors, Inc., Minneapolis; Downtown Minneapolis TMO, Minneapolis; Greene Espel, PLLP, Minneapolis; Groups Meetings Incentives, Inc., Minneapolis; Guidant Corp., CRM Division, Arden Hills; Hargrove & Associates, Inc., Minneapolis; Hennepin County; International Decision Systems, Minneapolis; Landform Engineering Company, Minneapolis; Manchester Companies Inc., Minneapolis; Mayo Clinic, Rochester; Meagher & Geer, PLLP, Minneapolis; Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Minneapolis; Meyer, Borgman & Johnson, Inc., Minneapolis; Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; Natural Resource Group, Inc., Minneapolis; Public Radio International, Minneapolis; Quality Bicycle Products, Bloomington; Ramsey County; Schilling Travel, Minneapolis; SPS Commerce, Inc., Minneapolis; Starkey Laboratories, Inc., Eden Prairie; TCF Financial, Wayzata; United Properties, Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Foundation Investment Advisors, Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Minneapolis; U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission, Minneapolis; USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services, Minneapolis; Utility Engineering, Minneapolis; Verisae, Minneapolis; Xerox Corp., Minneapolis

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